

HIDDEN



TREASURES

Landowner Manages for Future with His Heart

By **COLEEN VANSANT**, Information Specialist
Alabama Forestry Commission, Northeast Region, Cullman

OVER the last 14 years I have met, talked to, and visited with many TREASURE Forest landowners. I have come to realize that these landowners are unique individuals and all possess qualities and attitudes that make them special. These are things that make them members of a very elite group: TREASURE Forest owners.

Recently I had the opportunity to visit with Danny Baker on his 268-acre farm near Hackneyville in Tallapoosa County. It didn't take me long to realize that Danny is indeed a special TREASURE Forest owner. Within minutes I was able to identify several characteristics that put Danny Baker in the spotlight.

TREASURE Forest is in his heart.

Danny manages his farm the way he does because of the love he has for it. It's a love that runs deep and brings out in him an undying sense of caretaker. Danny takes his responsibility to his land seriously, and everything he does is with the attitude of doing something for the land and not something to it. Like a parent for a child, he nurtures it with love, and gently guides his land to be the best that it can be.

He has an inborn sense of stewardship. Danny didn't learn to be a steward of his land—he was born to be a steward of his land. Even before he heard about the TREASURE Forest program he was managing his family farm with a TREASURE Forest ethic. According to Danny, it was nearby TREASURE Forest owner Bobby Jennings who got him “interested and working more diligently” in the TREASURE Forest program.

He's proud. Like most TREASURE Forest owners, Danny Baker has pride. Not a selfish, destructive pride, but the same chest-swelling pride a father or mother has watching their child in his first T-ball game. Danny's father bought



Danny Baker of Tallapoosa County

the land in the late 1940s, and when he purchased it most of the topsoil had been removed. His dad planted pines in the 1950s that are still there today. Danny acquired the property from his mother in 1974 and since then has made his own mark on the land.

As you talk with Danny you can tell that he is not only proud of his accomplishments, but proud of the way the land has responded to his efforts. He knows every tree, bush, and animal trail and can readily notice any change that Mother Nature has made. Like most TREASURE Forest landowners, he can rattle off dates of when land was cleared and planted, how many seedlings were planted, and what kind of day it was when they were planted. He knows his land almost intimately and you sense that he probably feels its heartbeat. He's also proud of his two sons, Jonathan and Jamison, who have also taken an interest in the land.

He loves to share. You'll never meet a TREASURE Forest owner who doesn't love to talk about their farm and show it to everyone they can. According to Danny, “sharing it with other people that don't have a place to go and enjoy,” is one of the most wonderful things a landowner can do. A troop of Boy Scouts

regularly visits Danny's cabin on his farm, along with church groups and family. One of the greatest highlights was a group of nine Belarussian children who suffer long-term effects from the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear reactor meltdown. The children came to Alabama to be in a clean environment for a long period of time in order to give their immune systems the chance to strengthen. Danny was proud to share his farm with these children and hopes that the visit to his place might help them in even some small way.

He builds things to last. “Everything I do I have in mind that it will last for my boys,” says Danny. You can look around at the quality of his work and tell that it probably will. Danny doesn't just build something or repair something; he does the best possible job he can with the intention that it will be here for a very long time. Many of his fence posts and gates are welded steel, his barns are built and repaired with treated lumber, and even the outhouse he built near the pond and picnic area of his farm will endure anything short of a tornado.

He has become involved. Whether it's his land ethic, his pride in his place or his love of talking about his property, Danny, like many TREASURE Forest landowners, has become involved in spreading the word of good land management and the TREASURE Forest program. According to Danny, “It's something I believe in and enjoy.” In recent months, Tallapoosa County has become the home of a very enthusiastic and active TREASURE Forest Association. Danny has taken on the responsibilities of membership chairman.

It's TREASURE Forest landowners like Danny Baker who are making the world a better place for the rest of us.